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How Our Spy Spied Their Spy

America's Polish Mole Broke Case

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WASHINGTON

The dramatic case of James D. Harper Jr., the Silicon Valley computer consultant accused of selling American missile secrets to Polish and Soviet intelligence for $250,000 has lifted the veil ever so slightly on the murky, arcane world of counterintelligence. It is an upside-down world of "moles" and mirror images, where nothing is quite what it seems on the surface, a world in which the secret intelligence agencies of East and West clash in an unseen war.

Most of what is known about Harper, the accused spy, is detailed in a 33-page affidavit filed in the United States District Court in San Francisco by Allan M. Power, a special agent of the FBI assigned to Soviet Bloc counterintelligence duties for the past 20 years. It was Power's job to catch spies from Poland and other Eastern European nations. The FBI document tells this story: Harper was introduced to his Polish contacts by another Californian, William Bell Hugle.

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Beginning in 1975, there were a series of meetings in Warsaw, Geneva and Vienna. Harper turned over scores of secret documents to the *Sluzba Bezpieczenstwa*, or SB, the Polish intelligence service, which in turn passed them on to the KGB. Some of the information was obtained by Harper from his wife, Ruby Louise Schuler, who worked for Systems Control Inc., a Palo Alto defense contractor and who died last June (of alcoholism, according to Santa Clara County medical records). Many of the documents dealt with the secret and highly sensitive research conducted at Huntsville, Ala., on anti-ballistic missile defenses for the Minuteman and other U.S. strategic weapons. The army says the value of these documents to the Poles was "beyond calculation".

In an unusual aspect to the case, it was revealed that two years ago Harper contacted William Dougherty, a Southern California lawyer who had represented Christopher Boyce, a convicted Soviet spy. Harper apparently saw Dougherty's name in a book about the case.

In a series of clandestine meetings, Harper told Dougherty all about his spying and asked him to try to cut a deal with the government for immunity from prosecution. Dougherty contacted the Central Intelligence Agency and passed along Harper's statements. The Justice Department refused to deal, and instead, Harper was arrested. Ironically, his own admissions to Dougherty formed the heart of the case against him.

But what gives the case a special counterintelligence interest is that the United States claims it had a high-level mole inside the SB who was in a position to verify that Harper was indeed selling secrets to the Polish service. The mole worked directly with the two Polish SB agents who were Harper's case officers—Zdzislaw Przychodzien and his superior Sergei Gromotowicz. In 1980, they received a commendation for their work in the Harper case from Soviet leader Yuri Andropov, then the head of the KGB, the Soviet intelligence service.

The FBI affidavit refers to the mole only as "the Source." But enough is told about him so that, were he still in Warsaw, he would have been easily identified and arrested. At a press conference at which Harper's arrest was announced, the FBI and the Justice Department made it clear that the mole was no longer in Poland. Presumably he has defected to the United States and is being protected by U.S. intelligence. The FBI refused to comment on either the mole's identity or whereabouts.

Why did Harper come forward and volunteer his spy story to attorney Dougherty? No one is saying, but one possibility is that the mole revealed enough information to U.S. intelligence to cause the FBI to place Harper under surveillance. If the suspected spy became aware

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that he was being watched, he might have felt that the time had come to plea bargain with the government. But the FBI did not wiretap Harper until last May, and Harper began spilling his story to lawyer Dougherty two years ago. So there are still missing pieces to the story.

The world's intelligence agencies spend a lot of time trying to plant moles in each other's spy services. The Harper case illustrates their value. Any spy must live in dread that a mole inside the service for which he works will reveal his identity to the opposition. It is a major risk of the trade.

And the search for a mole can disrupt an intelligence agency. In 1961, a Soviet intelligence agent, Anatoli Golitsin, defected from the KGB in Helsinki. He warned his CIA debriefers that there was a high-level mole inside the CIA. Under James Angleton, the CIA's counterintelligence chief, the great mole hunt began. But in 1964, Yuri Nosenko, a second KGB man, defected to the CIA in Geneva. He discounted Golitsin's warnings and was interrogated for years. Held in solitary confinement, Nosenko tried to make a chess set out of clothing lint, but even that was taken away by his CIA guards. A series of secret CIA reports and analyses disagreed on whether Nosenko was a true defector or a dispatched agent of the KGB. In the end, Nosenko was rehabilitated and made a consultant to the CIA, and it was Angleton who was forced out. No mole was ever unmasked, but the dispute split the CIA, causing deep wounds from which it has yet to recover completely.

What exactly did Harper allegedly sell to the SB? The FBI won't go beyond the record, but one knowledgeable source said that during the late 1970s, when Harper is said to have been most active, a great deal of secret defense research centered on anti-ballistic missile defenses for the MX. At the time, President Carter wanted a mobile-basing system for the nuclear missiles, which would have been moved around like peas under a shell. President Reagan has opted for placing the MX in six silos. But, obviously, Soviet and American plans to protect their strategic nuclear forces are among the most prized secrets to be stolen by spies for either side.

Security experts here point to the enormous difficulty protecting secrets in a society like the United States where some 208,000 American civilians in 11,000 companies scattered around the country hold security clearances because they are engaged in defense work. It is much more difficult for American agents to penetrate Soviet research and defense facilities, since all are under tight government control. By contrast there have been numerous cases over the years of Soviet agents buying secrets from Americans who work in the aerospace or other defense industries.

Edward J. O'Malley, chief of counter intelligence for the FBI, said recently that there are approximately 3,000 Soviet Bloc personnel in the United States, of whom perhaps 35% have some type of intelligence responsibility. Acquiring defense and high-technology secrets is one of the chief targets of Soviet and other spies.

According to the FBI, Harper had some 150 to 200 pounds of secret documents hidden away, and was preparing to turn over more of them to the SB at the time of his arrest. Now Harper's alleged espionage career is over, and the CIA has lost a mole who was burrowing away inside the Polish intelligence service. Was the tradeoff worth it? Only the inhabitants of the secret world can answer that question. And they won't.

Journalist David Wise, a specialist on intelligence agencies, is the author of "The Children's Game," a recently published novel of espionage about the CIA and the KGB.